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# Educational Pluralism—a historical study of so-called ‘pillarization’ in the Netherlands, including a comparison with some developments in South African education

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**ABSTRACT** *Recently, modern democratic governments have been facing religious and other minorities demanding state funding of separate schools. A system of completely equal treatment of both state and denominational schools has existed in the Netherlands since 1920 and is firmly rooted in the Dutch history of the previous centuries. It may be of interest to know how this pluralistic system of ‘pillars’—as it has been called in Dutch historiography—came into being and how it has functioned ever since, even until the present day, when ‘pillarization’ is still a prominent feature of the Dutch educational domain, despite strong secularising and post-modern tendencies. This paper describes the historical roots of the Dutch pillarized educational system, i.e. of this remarkable subcultural segmentation of education—and of society in general—on the basis of different religious or philosophical views. In the process of pillarization a crucial part was played by Dutch Protestants. With South Africa being heavily influenced by these Protestants and South African educational history running partly parallel to Dutch educational history during the 19th century, it seems worthwhile to examine why pillarisation did not occur in the southern hemisphere. In order to understand the process of pillarization it is necessary to look well into the history of the Netherlands since the 17th century. Relevant similarities between the South African and the Dutch developments up to 1900 are presented as well. At the time when the Dutch system of educational ‘pillars’—or ‘voluntary apartheid’ as it has recently been called—fully developed towards the end of the 19th century, South African educational history, however, took a completely different course towards compulsory racial apartheid. The present revolutionary changes in South Africa, however, seem to entail some new interesting parallels between the educational situations in both countries. To substantiate this, the paper highlights some relevant features of 20th century South African educational developments, before analysing the present Dutch situation and giving the reasons for the permanent strength of the pillars. Not only are the old pillars still standing firmly, but new minorities of immigrants have also discovered the uses of the system of pillarization for identity-building and cultural emancipation. To conclude, the paper addresses the question of whether pillarization in education can and should be adopted outside the Netherlands.*

## Introduction

Only shortly after the end of the official system of racial segregation in South Africa, universally known by the originally Dutch word *apartheid*, the British philosopher of education, Mark Halstead, used this very term to designate an educational policy which modern democratic governments facing religious or other minorities that demand state funding of separate schools, should consider. In the 1995 volume of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* Halstead labelled these minority wishes 'voluntary apartheid' (Halstead, 1995). However, Halstead did not mean to propose a criterion for preferential treatment of any group within society. According to him, state expenditure on schools should be equally distributed among all people. It is surprising that Halstead has chosen the phrase 'voluntary apartheid' to advertise his proposal for the best and most equitable way to organize education. The history of educational and other discrimination through the official system of racial apartheid in the Republic of South Africa has demonstrated what gross inequality might ensue from a policy of educational favouritism. From the 1950s to the 1980s the expenditure on education of each white child was always around 10 times the expenditure on the education of an African child (Unterhalter, 1991, p. 52). Despite a considerable lessening of racial inequalities in recent years, white students are still heavily favoured (Enslin, 1994; Lemon, 1995, p. 111; Motala, 1995) [1]. So why choose the word 'apartheid', which stands for inequality? Some of his readers may be put on the wrong track. To us, however, Halstead's choice has been a challenge to make a comparison between the educational histories of the Netherlands and South Africa, which are related to each other and yet so different. Let us first follow Halstead in his analysis, and then see if it can be put to use for our purposes as historians.

Halstead insists that members of all cultural and religious groups should be educated in such a way that they will all be able to participate equally and fully as citizens in a democratic society. At the same time, however, he does advocate segregated schools, albeit under the condition that no parents should be forced to send their children to a specific school, even if it is founded for the benefit of the cultural group they belong to. This new educational apartheid must be voluntary. Halstead proposes a publicly funded varied system of schools with a common syllabus, which at the same time would allow minorities to preserve their distinct identities. Such an educational system involves general education for democratic citizenship (including education for cross-cultural understanding), which is common across all schools, and education for a specific cultural attachment, which is different in different schools. All schools should receive equal public funding, according to the principle of proportionality. Quality levels should be similar and guaranteed.

Surely, this is an interesting analysis of how liberal democratic societies may cope with the tricky dilemma between equality of educational opportunities, the promotion of cross-cultural understanding and full political participation of all citizens on the one hand and the right for minorities to foster a specific cultural and pedagogical identity and the freedom of educational choice for each parent on the other. Recent experiences with the heavily centralized educational system in France or the mono-ethnic tradition and the education of minority youth in Germany demonstrate that some degree of acknowledgement of multi-cultural and pluralist educational diversity seems to be inevitable if growing tensions between minorities and the majority in Western countries are to be avoided (Smolicz, 1990; Grant, 1997). Voluntary apartheid might offer a viable solution to some of the problems posed by modern cultural pluralism.

There is, however, a problem with Halstead's approach. As a philosopher of education, he has made an analysis which is purely theoretical. Reference to empirical evidence, e.g. the Dutch educational system and its history, would have provided him with a unique

opportunity to test his ideas in reality. To compensate, this article looks into the history and the present state of educational affairs in the Netherlands, where voluntary apartheid, or *verzuiling* (literally 'pillarization') as it has been called in Dutch historiography, has existed since 1920 (Kruithof, 1990, pp. 238 ff.), not merely with respect to schools, but as a prominent feature of Dutch society in general (Wintle, 1987; Bax, 1988; De Swaan, 1988; Post, 1989). Pillarization in general is the institutional arrangement which enables mutually interdependent social and political groups to maintain their autonomy to a perceived optimum, without a distinct geographical basis and within the frame of national sovereignty, ensuring the integration of these groups to a minimal degree while preventing the national identity or the social order from being jeopardized (Bax, 1988, p. 82).

Although pillarization with respect to schools has been the legal situation in the Netherlands since the end of the so-called 'School War' (c. 1830–1920), pillarization as a general aspect of Dutch society has a much longer history, as will become clear in this article.

The Dutch pillarized educational system, i.e. this remarkable subcultural segmentation or compartmentalization of education on the basis of different religious or philosophical *Weltanschauungen* (World Views), can be traced back to developments in the 17th century. Hence, the article starts by analysing these historical roots, notably the position of the Dutch Protestants, who have played a crucial part in the process of pillarization. As South Africa was also heavily influenced by these Dutch Protestants and South African educational history ran partly parallel to Dutch educational history during the 19th century, it seems worthwhile to examine why pillarization did not occur in the southern hemisphere. Therefore, relevant similarities between the South African and the Dutch developments up to 1900 are presented. At the time when the Dutch system of voluntary apartheid fully developed towards the end of the 19th century, South African educational history took a completely different course towards racial apartheid. The present revolutionary changes in South Africa, however, seem to entail some new interesting parallels between the educational situations in both countries. To substantiate this, this article highlights some relevant features of 20th century South African educational developments. In the Netherlands, voluntary apartheid is still the organizational framework of the educational field, notwithstanding strong secularizing and 'depillarizing' tendencies in post-modern society. This article explores the reasons for this paradoxical phenomenon. Not only are the old pillars still standing firmly, but new minorities of immigrants have also discovered the uses of the system of voluntary apartheid for identity building and cultural emancipation.

### Concepts and Figures

As the Dutch educational system is the point of departure for this historical and comparative study, it seems necessary to clarify some key concepts and to have some statistics at hand regarding the Dutch situation. Although the Dutch case of voluntary apartheid in education is clearly a special one (Idenburg, 1968; James, 1984; Koelman, 1987, pp. 90 f.; Glenn, 1992), religious segmentation within national educational systems is not uncommon. In most European countries and elsewhere, denominational schools have existed for a long time, with or without financial aid by their governments (cf. De Kwaasteniet, 1990, pp. 18 ff., pp. 229 ff.; Glenn, 1992). Yet such schools do not form an integral part of—nor do they occupy an equal place within—the public educational system, as they do in the Netherlands. The numerical superiority of denominational schools and the great variety of ideologies, religious or philosophical as well as pedagogical, are unique hallmarks of the Dutch system as well.

In this article we speak of 'public' schools, not in the British but in the American sense of the term, meaning the Dutch *openbare* (literally 'public') schools owned and operated by some public authority, notably municipalities. Such schools have to keep to 'neutrality'—as the Dutch law calls it—in matters of religion or politics, although they may adopt a specific pedagogical basis, for instance Maria Montessori's ideas. The other major category of Dutch schools is called *bijzonder* (literally 'particular' or 'extraordinary'); in this article we use in these cases the terms 'private', 'independent' or 'denominational' schools. They are owned and operated by different types of local organizations, e.g. associations of parents, which is usually the case with Protestant schools, or the Church and other religious bodies in the case of Roman Catholic schools. Such local private school boards are fully compensated by the government for all expenses, in proportion to the number of students attending the different schools, on exactly the same footing as the public ones (Idenburg, 1968). Nearly all of these private schools are indeed denominational.

At present, 35% of the primary schools are public, and therefore 'neutral' schools, 30% are Roman Catholic, 30% are different Protestant ones of a remarkable variety of denominations and 5% are private non-denominational with different pedagogical identities, such as Waldorf schools based on the educational ideas of Rudolf Steiner (more detailed statistics are provided in De Kwaasteniet (1990)). In secondary education, only 17% of all schools are public. All private schools are fully supported by state funds, but are free from governmental educational policies in important respects, aside from a common core curriculum and other constraints as will be discussed below (cf. Karsten, 1994, pp. 212 f.). Some of these legal restrictions—notably on tuition fees, extra allowances for teachers, capital investments—have caused the Dutch provision of schools to be extremely egalitarian: prestigious schools for social élites are very rare in the Netherlands (Dronkers, 1996, p. 54).

### **The First Phase of the Dutch School War**

Calvinism has left a strong mark on Dutch culture. Calvinists occupied most of the important positions in the religious, cultural, social, political and economic life of the Netherlands, from the late 16th century onwards and well into the 20th century, always leaving, however, rather a great deal of room and freedom for dissenting groups. Although never officially, the Dutch Reformed (i.e. Calvinist) Church was virtually the state church in the Republic of the United Netherlands (1588–1795) and still during the first decades of the Kingdom of the Netherlands after the Orange Restoration, i.e. from 1813 onwards. However, the state and the Dutch Reformed Church have been officially separated since the French invasion (1795). Consequently, the Netherlands gradually changed into a modern liberal society, whereas the influence of the Calvinists withered, and simple traditional believers seemed to become relics of ancient times, viewed by the liberal opinion leaders as backward and even dangerous reactionaries.

As a result, the state no longer wanted public schools to be biased in a Calvinist direction (Dodde & Lenders, 1991, p. 168). Nevertheless, the progressively minded Kingdom of the Netherlands still conceived of itself as a Protestant nation, implying that all schools had to be Christian schools. This meant prayers and psalms in the classroom, stories about Jesus as a model of morality and learning to honour the Wise Creator. At the same time, the national government wanted the schools to be truly open public schools in the sense that neither the Roman Catholics, Mennonites, Jews and Latitudinarians, nor the different streams within Reformed Protestantism itself could be offended by anything the teachers said or did. The Calvinist Heidelberg catechism and traditional textbooks had to be banned from the new liberal and tolerant Christian public schools. The new school as well as the modernized

Dutch Reformed Church were meant to be unifying forces in the new nation state (cf. Schama, 1970).

Meanwhile, some anti-rationalist and anti-liberal intellectuals as well as several small groups of orthodox Calvinists began to feel very uncomfortable with the enlightened and Latitudinarian climate of opinion, dominant within the Dutch Reformed Church and the new schools. In the 1830s some of them decided to confront authority and leave the high Church, starting their own Segregated (*Afgescheiden*) or Christian Reformed Church. In rejecting rationalist theology and the optimistic ideals of a liberal Christian civilization and a bourgeois morality without the dogmas of human weakness and the need for spiritual regeneration from above, they were explicitly harking back to the 17th and 18th centuries. Alongside their low churches, they founded fundamentalist Segregated schools in order to protect their children from enlightened influences. This growing orthodox Calvinist awareness marked the starting point of the so-called *schoolstrijd* ('School War' [2]), which was to divide the Netherlands for about 80 years, and which in certain respects is still a hot political item today, as will be demonstrated.

The government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands retaliated furiously against the anti-modern and anti-liberal insubordination by the members of the Segregated Church. The illegal schools and churches were seen as expressions of a reactionary attempt to benight the minds of the population and to frustrate national efforts towards a modern Christian society not divided by dogmatic differences. A united and centrally-governed state and a flourishing economy were the chief political aims at the time. There was no room for disagreement on educational goals and for theological hair-splitting.

Partly because of the threat of the 'spectre of revolution' which was haunting Europe in 1848, a democratic faction suddenly gained the upper hand, 'overnight' as it was said at the time. In that very year of revolution in Europe these democrats provided the Netherlands with a liberal constitution determining the political organization and culture of the Netherlands until the present day. The core of this constitution was the recognition of the civil rights and liberties, of which freedom of association, religion and education are particularly relevant to the history of the School War. It implied that the Segregated churches and schools could apply to the authorities for recognition. For the public schools the new state of affairs meant that they were becoming increasingly less Christian than before, although different religious groups were still granted the opportunity to provide extracurricular religious education to students whose parents so wished. From 1848 on, public schools were closely supervised to make sure that there was no religious bias. The end of this first phase of the School War, then, was characterized by strict religious neutrality in public schools and the freedom to start private schools.

Generally speaking, organizations or persons owning an independent school did not set great store by financial support from the government during the first decades after 1848, particularly because they were apprehensive of government involvement in the content and colour of education in exchange for subsidy. And the government, too, was of the opinion that people preferring education outside the regular public schools should provide the financing themselves.

### **Some Similarities and Differences with South Africa**

The development in the Low Countries described so far shows remarkable parallels with the early history of education at the Cape. There, too, popular schools remained Calvinist until Napoleonic times because they were under the tutelage of the Dutch United East-India Company and the local Reformed churches (Biewenga, 1994; Randall, 1995). The school-

masters were explicitly forced to conform to the religious and moral precepts of a Calvinist society by the education ordinance of governor De Chavonnes in 1714 (Atkinson, 1978). The period 1652–1795 thus witnessed the establishment of a system of Christian national education in South Africa.

A change came with the school ordinance of De Mist in 1804, which declared that the monopoly on education, enjoyed by the Calvinist church since the early days of the Cape Colony, was not to be continued. The enactment heralded a much more liberal approach to the educational system. This development was reinforced by the arrival of the English in 1806. Like the Dutch king in the same period, the English administration was striving for a general and denominationally mixed popular school. Lord Charles Somerset introduced new legislation in line with these liberal ideas of De Mist, transferring the responsibility for education from the church to the state (Behr, 1988). As was the case with regard to the Netherlands, we can establish likewise that in South Africa the de-Christianization of education had advanced so far by the middle of the 19th century that the Bible was to be banned from the regular lessons as principal textbook, 'to secure the advantages of the public school equally to all' (cited by Venter, (1929, p. 29); cf. Badenhorst, 1955, p. 41). This process of secularization and anglicization of the schools was further implemented through the arrival of the first British teachers, who were required to teach and give religious instruction without referring to denominational matters (Behr, 1984, p. 6 f.).

Because of this, private denominational schools flourished, an unusual and interesting example of which is the school of the Dutch-based society '*Tot Nut van 't Algemeen*' ('For the Public Welfare'). Two important characteristics of this school were the prominence given to religious instruction and the advancement of the Dutch mother tongue (Coetzee, 1958, p. 49). Moreover, as in the Netherlands, the various religious communities were permitted to provide extracurricular religious education in public school buildings. However, in the eyes of orthodox Afrikaner Calvinists this was ultimately *nie meer as 'n doekie vir die bloei van die wond nie* ('nothing more than sorry plaster for a bleeding wound') (Venter, 1929, p. 77). A further reaction to the policy of anglicization [3] was the start of the *Groot Trek* to the northeast away from the British authorities, during which children were educated by their parents or by a teacher who was on the *trek* as well [4].

In South Africa, too, continual attempts were being made in the course of the 19th century at a re-Christianization of the increasingly neutral state school, i.e. to make it Calvinist once more. When this proved unsuccessful, people continued to found private Reformed schools having closer links with the religious climate at home, in spite of considerable financial difficulties. Such efforts were made especially in the two so-called *Boererepublieke*, the Transvaal and later the Orange River Colony (McKerron, 1934, p. 39). The so-called C.N.O. movement (*Christelik Nasionale Onderwys*, Christian National Education) arose out of the fear that the Afrikaner ideals and the Dutch language would be completely suppressed. Strong relations with Dutch Calvinists still existed, the provision of education in the Transvaal Republic being to some extent a copy of the Dutch system and not a few teachers in Transvaal being Dutch immigrants (Schutte, 1986, pp. 105 ff., 139 f., p. 181).

However, we want to emphasize one striking difference between the developments in the south and the north during the 19th century [5]. Calvinist Afrikaners did not only criticize the secularization of education, like their Dutch kindred spirits, but they also felt strongly against Anglicization. Such opposition existed in the two *Boererepublieke*, e.g. when the *Boers* voiced their indignation about the legislation of the President T.F. Burgers, which was aimed at the secularization of popular education and the removal of dogmatic instruction from the schools and against the legislation of General J.C. Smuts in 1907, which did not put the Dutch and the English languages on an equal footing (Atkinson, 1978, p. 135). Some

*Boers*, partly on the grounds of both these grievances, even advocated that the government should completely withdraw from education. A financial argument played a role as well, Afrikaners believing that they were being put at a double disadvantage, because Reformed parents paid for the private schools out of their own pockets as well as for the public schools via taxation. In the Netherlands we frequently encountered a similar argument in denominational circles around the turn of the century.

The government in the Cape Colony continued to operate neutral and Anglicized public schools in spite of all the criticism and opposition. There was a significant reduction in the authority of the denominational clergy and no pupil could be forced to attend religious instruction without the consent of their parents or guardians. Still, it should be stressed that the strongest Calvinist church in terms of numbers, the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church), continued informally to have a good deal of influence on the nature and structure of public education in the Cape Colony as well as in the *Boer* republics, partly because quite a few school inspectors belonged to that church (Badenhorst, 1955, p. 179). Again there is a strong parallel with the relations between the high church and the educational system in the Netherlands, even though the striving for neutrality within public education was clearly stronger there. Members of the various church groups in both countries continued to found their private schools alongside the public schools.

### **The Second Phase of the Dutch School War**

During the first decades following the constitution of 1848 Protestant schools and a growing number of Roman Catholic schools had been fully self-supporting. The denominational schools had been apprehensive of government involvement in their educational freedom as a side effect of possible government subsidy. Not wishing 'to be bound by silver cords', they would rather work with thrift, donations and, with a view to the poor, the lowest tuition.

From the 1870s onwards, the legislator imposed increasingly costly demands on all schools with respect to the quality of education, school buildings, teaching staff and educational tools. These measures, which also applied as conditions for being permitted to found and maintain a private school, brought many of these unsubsidized schools into dire straits. For this reason, they began to offer strong opposition to the new legal requirements, notably through a large-scale popular petition in 1878. Nevertheless, parliament adopted the challenged measure for the improvement of education. Under the force of these circumstances, the supporters of independent education began to strive for financial support by the state. This revived the School War, which then entered a second phase, the ultimate goal being the 'financial equalization' (Idenburg, 1968) of both public and private primary education. This was achieved through the 'peace treaty' of 1920.

The growing costs of the modern schools were not the only reasons for the changing of denominational thinking in the Netherlands concerning financial support from the state for Christian education, another factor being that education was increasingly considered a vital social good in the course of the 19th century (Braster & Dodde, 1994). The schools were having more roles to play, at the cost of their traditional task of preparing young people for church and religious life. They also had to provide social, moral, civil, hygienic and national education, and later on physical, cultural and aesthetic education as well. The school had also been called in for professional training and general social qualifications. On all sides it had been argued that every child should enjoy regular education. However, not all were of the opinion that the state should be allowed to introduce compulsory education. This was considered as unjustified interference in the responsibilities and rights of parents in circles of denominational education. Not until 1900, later than in a number of comparable countries,



was compulsory education adopted by the Dutch parliament, with only a one vote majority. The introduction of compulsory education, giving strong impulses to the clamour of private schools for state subsidy, had, therefore, been another important cause of the end of the School War in 1920.

### **Voluntary Apartheid in Dutch Education**

An unintentional side effect caused by the second phase of the School War, i.e. the organized opposition against educational innovation from the 1870s onwards, had been that the different denominational streams in the Netherlands were becoming more aware of their interests and quantitative might. The action groups of the school law opposition in 1878 continued to exist in the aftermath as powerful pressure groups (cf. Kuiper, s.a.). This is how the first well-organized political parties arose in the Netherlands, the most important of which were the neo-Calvinist, i.e. in a religious sense strictly orthodox but in a social sense quite liberal and modern [6] and Roman Catholic parties. These parties were the crystallization points for the ideologically integrated networks of different functional organizations, which would much later be called *zullen* (pillars) in Dutch historiography. From around 1880 to around 1970, public life in the Netherlands was primarily divided along ideological lines and the different pillars were harmoniously 'living apart together' (Bax, 1988; Wintle, 1996) in a 'consociational democracy' (Lijphart, 1968). Not only various religious groups, but also the emerging social democratic labour movement developed into a pillar, with its own outlook on life, media, artforms, youth organizations, old age homes, sport and cultural clubs, social interest organizations, housing associations, insurance companies, health institutions, etc., comparable to the denominational pillars. Each pillar built up its own familiar and isolated culture, in which a great deal of energy and attention was devoted to educating a dedicated cadre with leadership abilities. All pillars maintained their own schools as well, except for the social democratic one because of their preference for the religiously neutral public school.

The Netherlands thus developed into a society of carefully kept checks and balances between these different ideological subcultures, isolated from each other, but working together rather harmoniously on a national level: a multicultural system, which has been aptly called 'consociational democracy' and 'the politics of accommodation' (Lijphart, 1968, 1985) or 'equitable public pluralism' (Skillen, 1996). The state accommodated to the citizen's different ideologies by pluralizing the services it controls and finances as well as by incorporating the differing world views into the public order (Carlson-Thies, 1996). State subsidies were allocated through the pillars—these ideological networks—according to the principle of proportionality. In this way, the presence of an intermediate layer of ideologically based private organizations, distributing public money for educational as well as social and cultural purposes, has become a salient feature of the Dutch welfare state in the course of the 20th century (De Kwaasteniet, 1990, p. 17). Pillarization was a cradle-to-grave pluralistic organization of society in which functional differentiation was overlaid by world view differences (Carlson-Thies, 1996). During a large part of the 20th century this extraordinary form of pillarized social cohesion provided numerous Dutchmen with a more prominent and stronger marker of their identities (Grant, 1997) than, for instance, socio-economic, functional or regional forms of solidarity or in some cases even kinship.

The phenomenon of pillarization of the public sphere, which had been developing since the middle of the 19th century, was undoubtedly the main reason why the Dutch parliament decided in 1920 to allow the government to finance fully all primary schools including the private ones on exactly the same footing. This resulted in an enormous increase in the number of denominational schools of widely divergent kinds, at the cost of public schools.

After a couple of years, the denominational primary schools already outnumbered the neutral public ones, and that has remained so up to the present day, as the figures mentioned in the Introduction show (cf. De Kwaasteniet, 1990, pp. 95 ff.) [7]. In the second half of the century other types of education have gradually come to receive 100% financing by the Dutch government as well, regardless of whether they are public or independent, from denominational Kindergartens to denominational universities. For instance, in the Netherlands one encounters vocational education or special schools for handicapped children in at least three variants: state non-denominational, private Protestant and private Roman Catholic, all of which are fully funded from taxes. Even the contemporary extensive structure of education support services and pedagogical counselling services has been divided along denominational lines from the very start. This means that the entire Dutch educational field has been pillarized. Of course, this peculiar historical development is facilitated by, and strongly rooted in, the fact that the Netherlands is a small and very densely populated country.

Admittedly, societal division along the lines of different philosophies of life is not an exclusively Dutch phenomenon (cf. Righart, 1986; Hellemans, 1988, 1990). We do find, for instance, in Belgium or in Austria important Christian political parties as well as large numbers of Christian private schools. However, comparison shows that pillarization has been more thorough, complex and far reaching in the Netherlands, where pillarization was an emancipatory process for different cultural minorities, where the very fabric of society has become pillarized, where the public funds of the modern welfare state are distributed through an intermediate layer of different kinds of pillarized bodies and where people used to regard themselves primarily as a member of a certain pillar (cf. Dijkstra *et al.*, 1997, p. 47 f.). Regarding the educational domain, central to our present argument, we would like to point to the fact that, as opposed to comparable Western countries, the Dutch private schools do form an integral part of the public educational system. This article seeks to show that the history and organization of the educational domain in the Netherlands are unparalleled in this sense.

### **During and After Apartheid in South Africa**

South Africa is a much larger country and circumstances have become increasingly different from those in the Netherlands. Consequently, educational developments on both sides of the equator began to diverge considerably during the 20th century (cf. Schutte, 1987). In the Netherlands, a system came into being in which the state started to finance fully private denominational schools and place all schools on an equal footing. In the southern hemisphere, formal diversity and racial discrimination prevailed. The four self-governing colonies controlled their own educational provisions, even well after 1910, when the new and more centralized Union of South Africa still granted the provinces a measure of local control in certain matters (Behr, 1984, p. 20). However, some initiatives were taken to establish a more homogeneous educational system. In 1953, an Interchurch Commission on Education was founded which presented several memoranda to the government during the period 1954–1962, stressing the need for a national system of education and the ending of the divided control over education (Behr, 1988, p. 98).

However, South Africa did not only support educational heterogeneity among whites in a regional and in a denominational sense. Education for non-whites had mainly been the responsibility of the missionaries. Gradually the provincial government departments of education subsidized mission schools and then established different types of public schools for different ethnic groups. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 confirmed discrimination

through the racially segregated state school system until the end of the apartheid era (Havighurst 1968; Unterhalter 1991, p. 56 f.; Randall, 1995).

All the same, during the apartheid era some attempts were being made to enlarge the role of religion in public education. The National Education Policy Act of 1967 (Act 39/1967) determined that education in the schools maintained and managed by the state, should have a Christian character, albeit that different religious convictions of parents and pupils should be respected regarding religious instruction and ceremonies (Behr, 1984, p. 39). In the meantime, educational apartheid and the Christian character of national education were increasingly criticized. In 1981, an investigation was launched in response to the crisis of boycotts and riots by black pupils who demonstrated their discontent with the system of apartheid and with the low standards of Bantu Education. The results of this investigation were published as the De Lange Report, which proposed a new dispensation for South Africa, namely, equal opportunities and standards for all (Collins & Gillespie, 1984; Buckland & Hofmeyr, 1993, p. 25). However, it was not until 1992 that this became a reality in South Africa with the announcement that there should be one single education department on the national level and provincial departments with considerable power. In 1993 the ANC's Draft Bill of Rights was published, article 5 of which deals with the 'Rights of association, religion, language and culture'. According to this article, 'there shall be freedom of worship and tolerance of all religions, and no state or official religion shall be established' and furthermore 'places associated with religious observance shall be respected, and no-one shall be barred from entering these on grounds of race'. These developments make it clear that there is no longer a Christian monopoly in state schools, as has already been the case in the Netherlands since the middle of the 19th century.

At the same time, however, it is a fact that in general parents have been granted much more influence in the state schools. The Hunter Report of August 1995, for instance, states that parental rights should be reflected in the recommended composition of a public school's governing body where the parent constituency has to be numerically the strongest (Hunter 1995, p. 43). This means that such a governing body also has the power to determine the identity, i.e. the ethos and character, of the school. The only precondition is that discrimination against any individual on any ground, will not be tolerated. The introduction of state-aided schools (the so-called Model C schools) increases the parental participation in school affairs as well. Parents also have the right, according to the new Constitution, to start private schools from their own funds.

Towards the end of the 20th century, then, parallels between the South African and the Dutch provision of education seem to develop again. However, the speed of the developments, as well as the complexity thereof, defy any attempt at a more thorough analysis as yet. A system of educational voluntary apartheid or *verzuiling* might be an answer to some of the educational problems in the new South Africa. To our minds, anyway, the redistribution of education funding to spread resources in a more equitable fashion is vital for the development of a more harmonious and just educational system in South Africa (cf. Motala, 1995).

### Old and New Pillars in the Netherlands

Even though Dutch culture and society have slowly but surely been depillarized in many respects during the last quarter of the 20th century due to secularization and the growing post-modern disbelief in all-encompassing ideologies, voluntary apartheid continues to be a dominant feature of the Dutch educational system (cf. Dijkstra *et al.*, 1997). Although it often seems very hard, if not impossible, for private denominational school boards to indicate in what respects their school differs from the state school next door, the pillars have been

successful in safeguarding their own state-maintained independent schools (cf. Rens & Van der Walt, 1995).

Meanwhile, criticism has been growing. First, there is a financial-economic argument. The present design of compartmentalization of primary education results in additional expenditure, mainly due to the fact that in sparsely populated areas different small schools of different denominations must be maintained by the state instead of fewer larger ones [8]. Compartmentalization of secondary and higher education is probably even more costly. In general, the recent economical need for cut-backs in overall government expenditure and the calls for more efficiency and larger scales give strength to this financially inspired criticism. In recent years, the Dutch government has, therefore, several times presented plans for a drastic increase of the minimum number of students a school must have if it wishes to be eligible for funding. Other types of criticism have been revived of late as well. Since the 19th century the champions of a uniform public school system have been accusing denominational schools of not fully endorsing civil virtues, democratic values and cross-cultural tolerance (cf. Koelman, 1987, pp. 88 ff.). Notably some fundamentalists within and without Christianity do not subscribe unconditionally to the fundamental rights of modern democracies, such as the freedom of speech for all and the principles of non-discrimination and tolerance. The question of whether measures should be taken to prevent groups professing such views from having their own schools while having the state pay them for indoctrinating their students is a very complex and contested one in the Netherlands due to the historical developments sketched above. Nowadays, it is broadly accepted that all young people need to learn to cope with and fully accept ideological diversity in today's open and multicultural society. It seems very odd in the light of the pervasive secularization of modern culture that so many children are still being sent to schools professing only one particular conception of good, even if all teachers in any school are required by law to introduce all students to different ideas and cultures. All citizens should respect and value, or learn to respect and value, multiformity, and no student ought to be confined to the self-imposed ghetto of a denominational school, say the advocates of a uniform public multicultural school system. All these objections have been compelling reasons for a growing number of Dutch people to reconsider seriously the much acclaimed freedom of educational choice for parents warranted by pillarization or educational pluralism.

Nevertheless, the majority of Members of Parliament appear to attach enormous value of this voluntary apartheid laid down in the Dutch Constitution. Undoubtedly, this has a great deal to do with the fact that so many people in the Netherlands are dependent on the private educational sector for their livelihood. Another important factor is that attempts to affect the position of power of the Christian educational interest organizations are completely non-negotiable for one of the four largest political parties in the Netherlands, the Christian (cf. De Kwaasteniet, 1990, pp. 180 ff.). In a sense the Dutch educational system and Dutch politics have been based on the authority, influence and intermediate role of such organizations, as is much of Dutch society in general. To wish to put an end to that would mean an enormous break with the past. Furthermore, for many parents, Christian education has the reputation of functioning better than public education, one of the reasons for this prestigiousness being, we believe, that Christian schools are generally better equipped given the fact that they receive exactly the same amount of money from the state as the public schools, but also have additional financial resources, such as—rather small—extra tuition, donations and capital from the past. Christian schools also have a reputation of being more orderly, thorough and effective, i.e. they are believed to deliver students to a higher level sooner than their public counterparts. Independent schools allegedly perform better than public ones. Educational research, however, has cast serious doubts on this claim (Dijkstra, 1992, p. 154;

Roeleveld, 1994, p. 203): if systematic differences in educational effectiveness can be observed at all between public and private schools, they would be explained better by pointing to the circumstance that in regions where there is strong competition between schools for new students, schools are naturally encouraged to perform better and be more effective in order to enrol enough students to survive, this being chiefly a challenge for Christian schools that show no major differences regarding beliefs and views compared with public ones in the same region (cf. Roeleveld, 1994, p. 225) [9]. Finally, many parents seem to think that some kind of religious education in school cannot harm their children, even if such parents do not have strong religious convictions themselves. Public schools have tended to avoid religious and moral issues. Denominational schools, then, are often considered to be the right choice by parents who care for a value-oriented type of education, even more so since most of the Christian schools have become less and less orthodox in recent years (cf. Dronkers, 1996, p. 57).

All this does not alter the fact that the majority of Christian schools in the Netherlands have been going through a serious identity crisis, whether they admit this openly or not. They tend to play down their religious roots. In this respect we can speak of a hollowing-out of voluntary apartheid, a kind of 'depillarization' from within. In addition, schools of various denominations are being threatened in their existence in a very specific way because for a long time it has been doubtful whether they can count on a constant and sufficient inflow of students from their own crumbling rank and file. Many independent schools try to escape from this predicament and from their ideological shyness in a depillarizing environment by advancing ideologically irrelevant features, such as the dubious claim of effectiveness mentioned earlier and by trying to enrol students from the new religious minorities, i.e. Muslims.

In contrast to this depillarization from within, new pillars have arisen in recent years. During the past 20 years, various small fundamentalist, traditionalist and pietistic streams within Dutch Calvinism have been experiencing a remarkable growth, which is also reflected in the proliferation of new pillarized educational institutions, separate from and partly in opposition to the established Protestant ones.

In addition, immigrant groups, sizeable in the major Dutch cities, in particular those with an Islamic or Hindu religious background, have recently begun to utilize the constitutional freedom of education by founding their own primary schools on a religious basis (Sietaram, 1992). Like other private schools, these educational institutions can count on full government funding, provided they meet the normal legal conditions (cf. De Kwaasteniet, 1990, pp. 209 ff.). It is a requirement, for instance, that an association wishing to start an Islamic primary school must demonstrate that the legal minimum number of 200 students will be realized within 5 years. Moreover, the teaching staff should possess the normal powers and qualifications. The school must provide regular primary education, as required by law. The lessons must therefore be focused on the ability to function adequately in Dutch society, which means, for instance, that sufficient attention is paid to the Dutch language, that the students are familiarized with the various religious and cultural streams within Dutch culture and that they are prepared for the multicultural character of the Netherlands. An important requirement is also that the exit levels of the primary schools should dovetail well with the different types of secondary education. In recent years, several dozens of such immigrant schools have come into existence and it would seem that several new pillars are being built (Driessen, 1996).

Such private, yet publicly funded Muslim or Hindu schools, however, should not be confused with a related, but fundamentally different phenomenon which is not at all in line with the intentions behind Dutch educational pluralism. In the Netherlands, as in other comparable countries, so-called 'black' and 'white' schools have developed during the past

few years (cf. Sietaram, 1992; Karsten, 1995). Particularly in the major cities, a number of schools, public as well as private, have been turning into 'black' schools. Such schools are primarily attended by children of poor immigrant families in the neighbourhood. White families, notably white middle-class families, living near the school are inclined to send their children to a 'white' school, even if it is located much farther away from their homes. This behaviour leads to the prejudice that 'black' schools have a lower level of education. Conversely, immigrant parents are inclined, according to recent research (Van der Wouw, 1994, p. 156), to send their children to schools which are attended by an above-average percentage of immigrant children [10]. Naturally, this informal form of (voluntary?) apartheid on an ethnic basis is considered undesirable in wide circles and certainly by the Dutch government. This grass-roots ethnic segregation does not in any way run parallel with the ideological segregation between public and private education regulated by law, as described above. Of course, the segregation of 'black' and 'white' schools is diametrically opposed to the notion of the multicultural society that is based on pluralism, equality, mutual contacts and respect, a notion almost unanimously accepted, at least in Europe (Grant, 1997). Dutch municipal authorities have been attempting to reverse this ethnic compartmentalization of late, although this turns out to be extremely difficult because of the fundamental and historical freedom of choice with respect to schools in the Netherlands.

### **Conclusion: a lesson from history?**

Educational developments in South Africa and the Netherlands have shown little mutual resemblance in the 20th century. Although racial apartheid was a salient feature of much of 20th century South Africa, voluntary apartheid has not been a viable option there, if only for reasons of the extremely high costs of such a system and the low population density in that huge country.

Still, there is a quality of fairness about the Dutch educational system which might be of interest to other societies. We believe to have demonstrated that voluntary apartheid in Dutch history, under the specific conditions of place and time, has helped cultural minorities to work themselves up from a disadvantageous position towards equality, while promoting social harmony, solidarity and commitment on the national level (Sturm, 1993; Knippenberg, 1996). What was essential to this emancipatory process of gaining political strength and cultural self-reliance through social isolation—aptly phrased 'sovereignty in one's own circle' or 'sphere sovereignty' (Kuyper, 1880)—was that these minorities were being more and more financially supported by the government and were finally accepted as firm and vital pillars of society as a whole. The pillars were not merely private organizations, but they were pivotal parts of the state system with equivalent legal standing (Carlson-Thies, 1990). Obviously, the constitutionally guaranteed equal treatment of the various subcultures in Dutch history is the big difference with the apartheid policy vis-à-vis the different ethnic groups in South African history, where social compartmentalization implied inequality and discrimination. In contrast, the isolated pillar cultures in Dutch history offered minorities opportunities for cultivating their own cadre of leaders and for developing a more positive self-image. With self-reliance increasing, the pillars began to show cracks and holes, through which different cultural influences could penetrate. Hence, subcultures and dominant culture gradually approached each other and finally integrated. In Dutch history this was a circuitous and costly, but nevertheless democratic and effective means of emancipating members of minority groups into full-fledged and equal citizens of a complex society. In retrospect, the conviction imposes itself on the present authors that in this way serious frictions between dominant culture and cultural minorities were prevented. This is probably the reason why the tensions that

normally arise from the experience of inequality and unjust treatment have had less opportunity to develop in pillarized Dutch society. Hence, the feeling is strong among the Dutch that a similar 'pillarizing' approach to the problem of the present day migrant groups, e.g. the Muslims, is preferable to both policies which regard immigrants either as just normal citizens, as seems to be the case in Australia, or as temporary residents, as seems to be the case in Germany (Smolicz, 1990).

Recently, it has been argued that the state should back off from the provision of education completely (Tooley, 1996). The market is supposed to offer better guarantees for equality of opportunities for all. Indeed, as we have mentioned above, the Dutch state seems to be unable to prevent a racially-based system of 'black' and 'white' schools from developing within the otherwise rather fair system of pillarized education. However, it would seem rather doubtful whether leaving education to the free market would promote cultural pluralism and ethnic equality more effectively, especially in countries with a large extremely poor and powerless population.

Although voluntary apartheid in the Netherlands—educational pillarization—was initially not the intention of the promoters of this type of educational freedom, but the unexpected outcome of the long historical process sketched above, it seems worthwhile pondering on the question whether the system could or should be adopted elsewhere. If this societal form of 'living apart together' was to be brought into practice today, e.g. in Germany, France or South Africa, circumstances would be different, and no doubt developments over time would show that the outcome would inevitably not be what people had in mind when starting the process. Yet if a renewal in thinking on education, pluralism, multiculturalism, emancipation and equity is called for, Halstead's plea for voluntary apartheid in combination with the Dutch historical experiences with educational pluralism deserves close attention, as we hope to have demonstrated.

## NOTES

- [1] This inequality could be analysed from a class perspective as well, South African schools no longer being racially segregated. However, middle-class schools still cater more for white children.
- [2] English language renditions of the Dutch School War can be found in Carlson-Thies (1990, pp. 186 ff.; 1996), De Kwaasteniet (1990, pp. 73 ff.), Bax (1988, pp. 89 ff.), De Swaan (1988, pp. 99 ff.), Van der Walt (1994), Idenburg (1968), Van den Hoek (1987, pp. 6), Kruithof (1990, pp. 265 ff), Braster & Dodde (1994).
- [3] Highlighting features of the South African history of education relevant for a comparison with the Dutch situation, we leave aside the British educational policy at the time.
- [4] Some schooling for non-whites was provided by missionary societies (Biewenga, 1994, Randall, 1995).
- [5] Focusing on a comparison between South African and Dutch educational history, we must admit to neglecting other 'striking differences' between the two countries, notably the South African history of education from the British and the non-white perspectives.
- [6] An overview of the contribution of Calvinist ideology to the building of pillarized Dutch society is provided by Skillen (1996); cf. Sturm & Groenendijk (1998). Bratt (1996) gives more about Dr Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), the leader of Dutch neo-Calvinism and one of the godfathers of pillarization.
- [7] In addition, more and more private schools have been founded being not distinct from the public ones in beliefs and views, but in pedagogical conceptions, e.g. Montessori, Waldorf, Dalton and Jena schools.
- [8] According to thorough calculations (James, 1984; Koelman, 1987). For obvious reasons this is a very delicate issue in Dutch political debates.
- [9] Probably as a result of the history of Dutch pillarized education, class does not seem to be an important factor at all, when it comes to analysing differences between public and private (denominational) schools.
- [10] Typical for the Dutch situation seems to be that no major differences have been demonstrated with regard to the distribution of 'black' and 'white' schools among public and private ones, comparable to the fact that social class does not seem to play an important role in the composition of the population of public as opposed to private schools. Oddly enough, different Protestant and Catholic school boards seem to be very eager to attract pupils from Islamic or Hindu background, apparently acting on the notion that adherence to any religion binds people together.

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